Colchester Public Schools

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Dear Members of the Colchester Community,

At last night's Board of Education meeting, public discussion began regarding the proposed education budget for the 2026–2027 fiscal year. My goal from the outset is to lead this conversation with clarity, transparency, and a deep respect for our role as stewards of your tax dollars. The proposed education budget increase is uncharacteristically high and while we are still awaiting a few final figures, is projected to be north of 10%. In actual dollars, that is an increase of over $5,000,000 from last year. I believe it is important to acknowledge that reality upfront and clearly explain the factors driving this proposal.

This challenge is not driven by new programs, expanded staffing, or discretionary initiatives. Instead, it is the result of the years-long practice of underfunding our health insurance fund to combat rising education costs, combined with unprecedented volatility in health care costs. As a self-insured district, we are susceptible to the same rising medical costs and premium hikes felt by employers and households nationwide.

Over the past 18 months, an unusually high volume of medical claims, coupled with sharp increases in stop-loss coverage, has materially impacted our health insurance reserve. In practical terms, this budget is designed to do two things:

1. Meet our immediate legal and ethical obligations to provide contracted health benefits.
2. Restore our reserve to a sustainable level to prevent even more severe fiscal instability in future years.

In preparing the upcoming budget proposal, District leadership has been scrutinizing every line item to ensure efficiency without compromising our core mission: ensuring every student is *Connected, Accepted, and Ready to Learn*. I'm confident the Board of Education will do the same prior to adopting a 2026-2027 budget to bring to the Board of Finance for review. We are actively exploring long-term structural solutions to manage these costs and reduce future volatility.

While we must protect the privacy of individual health information, we remain committed to a transparent dialogue regarding our overall fiscal strategy.

I invite you to join us as we work through these difficult decisions. Your voice is a vital part of this process:

- Budget Presentation: February 18, 6:00 p.m. (Black Box Theater, WJJMS)
- Budget Workshops: February 23 & 26, 6:00 p.m. (Black Box Theater, WJJMS)

Thank you for your partnership and your continued investment in the success of Colchester's students.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Sullivan III
Superintendent of Schools